

Feminism Isn't A Political Party: My Case for a Real Liberal Feminism

Copyright (c) TaraElla 2017. All rights reserved.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Contents

Foreword.....	5
Chapter 1.....	7
Chapter 2.....	13
Chapter 3.....	105
Chapter 4.....	111

For more Princess's Spirit Ideas

There are more fiction and non-fiction titles by TaraElla relating to the Princess's Spirit concept.

TaraElla also maintains a blog and (upcoming) show inspired by the Princess's Spirit, called The TaraElla Show.

Visit **www.taraella.com** to find out more.

Disclaimer

While effort has been made to describe accurately the historical events referenced in the book, the accuracy of such events described cannot be guaranteed.

Foreword

This is a book about liberal feminism, why feminism should be liberal, and what real liberal feminism should look like, in my humble opinion.

This book is actually made up of excerpts from my other books. I could have written a similar book with similar ideas from scratch, but I thought this approach was better. Firstly, a theoretical book about liberal feminism, arguing its case from front to back, really looks too similar to some of what's already out there. While I believe I do have something new to contribute, there is a possibility that the similarities will drown out any differences for many readers. To effectively introduce new ideas, a fresh format is often a good option. Secondly, I have already, in the past, chosen to make my case for liberal feminism via fiction,

again for effectiveness reasons. To select excerpts from that novel to highlight and make my case more clearly and succinctly would be a good idea, I think. Thirdly, liberal feminism is actually liberalism as applied to gender issues, no more or less, and therefore liberal theory in general can directly apply to liberal feminism too. As liberalism is already universal, there is no need to rewrite liberal theories and ideas specifically for applying to feminism, just like there is no need to reinvent the idea of freedom of speech for each kind of speech one may encounter in society.

Stay strong and keep the dream alive,

TaraElla.

Chapter 1

Why Liberal Feminism, Part I

Taken from **Liberal Revival Now: A Moral and Practical Case for a 21st Century Back-to-Basics Liberalism**

Right now in the early 21st century, it appears that feminism has come of age. The equality of the genders is a mainstream concern like never before. We have a great opportunity to right the historical wrong of gender inequality, once and for all.

However, there appears to be a complication. Feminism is supposed to bring about freedom and equality for everyone regardless of gender. However, many of the very people feminism should benefit most do not feel that feminism is doing this right now. For example, many young women still feel that feminism is about boys vs girls which they want no part in, or that feminism means supporting specific viewpoints which are incompatible with their own ethics. When so many mainstream celebrities are voicing these viewpoints, it really poses a problem for the future of feminism. Some young women feel that feminism, at least in its current form, is all about the aspirations of

career women only, and doesn't care about stay-at-home mothers. Some women even associate feminism with hairy legs and butch attire, thus thinking that their feminine high-maintenance attitude makes them a poor fit with feminism. And this is not to mention LGBT women, who have actually sometimes suffered discrimination at the hands of so-called feminists. It's not much better for men, who are simultaneously told to identify as feminists too and told that identifying as a feminist is 'cultural appropriation'.

Many dedicated feminists will quickly cry out that the aforementioned are merely misunderstandings about feminism, and that more 'education' on what feminism is (sometimes by shouting down or mocking opposing viewpoints) will change things. However, I believe this is an authoritarian attitude. The liberal attitude is to be inclusive, respect others' viewpoint, and acknowledge its

existence. If so many people view feminism this way, then maybe feminism really comes across like this sometimes! What is clear is that feminism is failing in its mission of freedom and equality regardless of gender, at least in the eyes of these people.

And a lot of mainstream feminism right now isn't exactly liberal. In the current quest for equality, illiberal currents have surfaced, and some have received substantial support within the feminist movement, unfortunately. These include an increase in political correctness, marginalisation of certain viewpoints, restrictions on freedom of speech, and an increase in gender boundaries and their rigidity. For example, feminists who have concerns about affirmative action or who are pro-life are increasingly excluded from the feminist movement. Even those who want to speak up for their inclusion are sometimes seen as 'traitors'. Trans people are told to put up with

outdated second-wave feminist policies that make their life painful, in exchange for 'inclusion' in the sisterhood. Other young women want to speak up, but don't dare. In order to keep your feminist cred, you must shut up and 'respect' your overlords, it seems. This dog's breakfast of a situation will become the undoing of feminism itself, if things don't change. But how can things change?

Enter liberal feminism. It is actually returning liberalism to its origins. Feminism is about freedom and equality after all, the very things liberalism is about. Liberal feminism is thus simply liberalism as applied to gender issues, and this is also what true feminism should be, no more, no less. In this way, liberal feminism is no more than a subset of broader liberalism, and no less than a very important part of broader liberalism, being concerned with issues that affect arguably the majority of the population deeply. Thus liberal feminism, like

liberalism, is also all inclusive in its nature, and does not require adherents to toe a particular 'party line', except for a general and sincere belief in freedom and equality for all. No longer will anyone feel that they are misfits with feminism, unless they actually do not believe in freedom and equality for all.

Chapter 2

Why Liberal Feminism, Part II

The following are excerpts from my novel, **3 Movements (Feminism, LGBT Rights, Marriage Equality), 2 Diaries, 1 Trans Woman's Message**

I could have written a manifesto of inclusive feminism, but I know that some of you would still be unconvinced.

So instead here is a story, inspired by real life stories I have known. I am sure many of you will be convinced of the need for a more inclusive feminism after reading this.

Natalie is a young trans woman living in the early 21st century. Her diaries chart both her own transition story, and the cultural and political events of the 2000s and 2010s in the US, UK and Australia. In the beginning, she had felt rejected by feminism all her life, and also decided to reject feminism. Feminism's complicated relationship with marriage equality, something she was passionate about, became yet another reason for her to reject feminism. However, as feminism changed, so did her perspective. Did Natalie ultimately decide to become a feminist? And if so, on what terms?

May 2003

Does School Have To Be Like This?

I hate putting on my school uniform. Why? It marks me out as 'male'. But the rules say I have to wear it anyway.

Why do schools have to be so mean, to make rules that make people unhappy? Well, you may say that they don't make these rules for trans people. That's definitely true, trans people are so rare that schools and rule makers are generally unaware of our existence. I mean, my school isn't 'bad' anyway, they have made an effort to make gay students feel included, for example, which is better than what many other schools are like. You can't expect them to know about trans students, right?

But why does the school have to have a male and female uniform? Out there, in the real world, many clothes are unisex nowadays. But schools are like, stuck in the 19th century, where all clothes are either male or female.

Let's ask another question. Why can't trans students go to school as their real gender? This would work well, right? But there would certainly be an uproar from other parents. There have indeed been a few cases around the world where trans students have attempted to go to school as their real gender, but it hasn't always worked out well apparently. Which explains why there have only been very few cases of this happening. This also only happens in some very open-minded, 'progressive' areas, and I'm sure where I live doesn't count as one. Furthermore, all of the handful of cases I know of are in places where students don't have to wear a uniform. I guess this makes it easier too.

Which brings me back to the uniform, and rules in general. Rules are bad for minorities. Rules are inflexible, and minorities who aren't well catered for get caught up in them. Which is why society shouldn't have that many rigid rules, in my opinion.

April 2004

Trans Girls Not Welcome?

Lately I have been very into reality TV. American Idol is my favourite, but there are many others. I like watching people chase their dreams, stepping up to new challenges week after week, trying to do their best. In fact, their spirit has become great inspiration to many people around the world. For most shows, there are also internet forums, where fans can gather to discuss the show, and of course, cheer on their favourites. Quite a few on there have also said that their favourites have inspired them to try out next year.

So what about me? Do I want to try out? It's complicated. In an ideal world, I would. But I wouldn't want to go 'as a boy'. It's not the real me, and I don't want people cheering on someone that's not the real me. Can I go 'as a

girl'? Maybe. After all, drag queen Courtney Act was on last year's Australian Idol. But then, she didn't get into the top 12. Besides, drag queens are often seen as just a bit of entertainment, actual trans girls may be seen quite differently. So it's probably not worth it.

Feminists complain about the glass ceiling limiting women's advancement. But then, trans girls don't get even the opportunities average people enjoy. How can this not be a bigger problem?

November 2004

The Worst Result

It was never likely to end happily, but this year's US elections were horrible. Anti gay marriage referenda passed in every state they were on the ballot, meaning that the introduction of gay marriage by courts or state legislatures is now prohibited in more than 30 states. The Republicans' strategy to court the religious vote also triumphed: not only has President Bush been returned, but they now control both houses of Congress. Analysts are already wondering if the Democratic party has any chance at all of getting back into government in the short to medium term. With the Republican party benefiting so much from the religious right, this bloc is expected to have an increased say in future government policies.

Post-election analysis have paid particular attention to the religious vote, or 'values voters'. Which is probably just a nicer way to say voters who were stridently opposed to gay marriage, given that this was the only 'values' issue being widely debated this year. There are now suggestions that the Democrats should engage with these voters, and perhaps somewhat alter their platform to suit these voters. This makes me very worried indeed. While the immediate results of this election was bad enough, if a 'bipartisan consensus' forms around a need to bow down to the demands of the religious right, a lot of needed reform will be blocked for a generation or more.

Perhaps it was only a 'messaging' problem, other people have suggested. For example, the religious right has painted gay marriage and its supporters as anti-family, and their platform as pro-family-values. But what's so anti-family

about encouraging gay couples to get committed and 'settle down'? These election results have also prompted the rise of a 'religious left', who criticise the religious right for failing to address the economic needs of many struggling families. How is this consistent with family values? The truth is that the religious right agenda is not 'the family values agenda', and its opponents are not anti-family either. We need to get this message out, before it's too late.

Perhaps what we have got is a wake-up call. We really need to fight for our values. We really need to engage with the public and explain and argue for what we believe in. Otherwise, our opponents will gain the upper hand, by default.

October 2005

Is Feminism Relevant Anymore?

Today, I read an article discussing if feminism is relevant to our times anymore. The author made the point that most young women don't actively identify as feminists nowadays, because they do not feel its relevance to them. They feel that the main goals of feminism, like voting rights, equal pay for the same work and anti-discrimination laws have all been achieved even before they were born. They just don't feel that feminism has anything to offer them.

I think that if young women today don't embrace feminism, it's not their fault. Rather, it may be the fault of feminism itself. If feminism claims to be a movement that is about empowering women, it certainly isn't living up to its ideal, from the point of view of today's young women. Maybe it's because feminism

isn't listening. What I mean is, it hasn't been inclusive and adaptive enough to meet the needs of modern young women.

Speaking as somebody who identifies as female, feminism has also failed me. While they claim to be against the 'patriarchy', many feminists are even more transphobic than the patriarchy itself. Moreover, the 'rights' that the feminist movement are all about sometimes feel like another layer of exclusion to me. The anti-discrimination that they support is clearly for 'women born women' only, and some feminists have even opposed anti-discrimination laws for trans people. The affirmative action they support is again for 'women born women' only, and every time I apply for something and know that I will be considered as a 'man' for the purposes of affirmative action, it increases my gender dysphoria ten-fold. Most feminists don't even care about the likes of myself.

The point is, if feminism has ceased to be relevant, it's because older feminists haven't actually listened to what young women really want, and haven't been inclusive enough.

August 2006

The Paper Trail

One of the hassles of gender transition is the need to change your documents. And even though I am only 20, and I don't have bank loans, mortgages, insurance policies, or even a car, there are actually many documents to be changed. To make things more difficult, each document is handled by a different organisation or government department, each with different rules on what other documents you need to bring, and what forms you need to fill out. (In contrast, most people only change their name due to marriage, and a marriage certificate would generally suffice for that.) To make things even more difficult, some departments are only open on certain days, and some are located at inconvenient locations I've never been before.

The key to success here is to have good organisation. Firstly, you need to decide which ones to change first. Doing them in a certain order can make everything more convenient. Secondly, each document to be changed needs to be treated like a project on its own, ideally with its own folder. For every such 'project', there are forms to fill and supporting documents to keep track of. Finally, you need to arrange for times to visit the departments, some of which require bookings. I guess in this regard I'm luckier because I'm still a student.

And then there's the nervousness, and the surreal quality of it all. Throughout the process, I kept wondering what the man or woman reading my application was thinking. Did they see me as weird? Have they handled other trans cases before? (Probably not.) Are they surprised to receive my case? (Probably yes.) Everyone I've come across have been very professional, though.

It's no wonder that some trans people just keep putting off the whole process for years, or only do some of it. Besides actually costing some money, it is also both intellectually and emotionally demanding, especially if you want to get it right in one go. I guess it would be particularly difficult for those in a depressed mood.

Shouldn't it be easier?

March 2007

Not That Much Has Changed

A favourite topic of discussion among the internet trans community is 'how is life different now that you're perceived as a different gender'.

To be honest, not that much has changed. I love the way I look and I love my clothes, but I don't see much of a change in my life. Certainly, you would expect that people who know already me wouldn't treat me differently. But I am a university student and I meet new people every day. I can say with confidence that I have not noticed any substantial change in the way strangers or newly introduced people treat me.

There have been a few subtle changes, like other women complimenting me on my clothes

and accessories, and that's very nice. I feel that men are more likely to hold doors open for me, but this is not a consistent thing, nor did this consistently not happen last year. I like the subtle changes, but I have to say they are subtle.

Maybe more changes will come. Maybe not. We'll see.

May 2007

Trans and Feminism

The relationship between transwomen and feminism is, complicated.

Feminists are currently divided on how they perceive us. There are those who think that only 'women born women' (as if we aren't) should be included, and there are those who believe that transwomen should be included too. Those who want to exclude us have traditionally been the majority view in feminism, but some younger generation feminists are now arguing for change in their movement. Still, it appears that those who want to exclude us continue to have the upper hand.

On the other hand, many transwomen actually want to be feminists. It is as if they see being a feminist, and acceptance by other feminists, as the ultimate validation of their identity as a woman. Transwomen who are feminists often call themselves transfeminists. In fact, there are websites dedicated to the idea of transfeminism. Transfeminists regularly join with other trans-friendly feminists to argue for trans inclusion, against old-school feminists, using the internet as their battleground.

I see it this way: I have no interest in joining a club that doesn't want me there anyway. I do appreciate that quite a few younger feminists want to welcome us into their movement, but it is clear that many feminists, maybe the majority, are still hostile to us. I feel that, in the feminist club, I would have to battle even harder to have my identity recognised than in the outside world. So, no thanks.

By the way, it's not as if you have to be in the feminist club to be a real woman. Just two years ago, I read a newspaper article questioning if feminism is still relevant. Many young women our age actually don't want to identify as feminists. Some feel that the term is associated with a 'boys vs girls' attitude, and others think that the big feminist fights are over in the West anyway. So not belonging to the feminist club doesn't make you less of a woman. In fact, it may mean that you are simply with the majority of young women nowadays.

August 2007

Maybe That's The Way It Should Be

A few months ago I recorded whatever (few) changes I saw in my life as a result of being perceived as a different gender. At the time I was semi-expecting to see more changes as time went on.

But I have to say, no, my life is still mostly the same as before. I love not being referred to by a male name and male pronouns, but apparently I'm still the same person. As I'm still the same person with the same personality, the way I interact with people and the way people treat me have remained very similar to before. What else should I expect?

And in this day and age, it's not like that men and women are treated very differently

anyway. We don't live in the 1950s anymore, and I'm thankful for that. So what was I thinking, expecting that people would somehow treat me 'very differently'?

I guess the idea of being treated 'very differently' as a result of gender transition comes from the observation that masculine men and feminine women are certainly treated in different ways by their peers, mainly as a result of the different ways they interact with the world. But trans people don't go from very masculine men to very feminine women. I didn't put up a masculine act two years ago, and I don't put up an ultra feminine act now. I wouldn't have interacted with the world like the very masculine man back then, and don't interact with the world like the very feminine woman today. Whatever gender I am perceived as, I always interact with the world as myself, in my own style. Consequently, it shouldn't be

surprising that I am received in a similar manner.

Many internet trans women love to say things like they lost 'male privilege'. I don't know if it's a genuine reflection or just another attempt to look 'feminist'. Even before transition I did not notice much 'male privilege' in everyday life, but back then, as I had not experienced living as a girl my opinion probably wasn't as valid. But recent experience has, if anything, confirmed my previous view. Certainly, there may be an element of 'male privilege' if you want to be a CEO or a politician, but to experience 'male privilege' or 'female disprivilege' everywhere in everyday life is a bit of a stretch of imagination in my opinion.

One of the surprisingly important things I have learnt through gender transition is that gender is only one 'property' of a person, and not the

most important one by far. It doesn't undermine the importance of my transition though, as I had to do it to get the gender 'distraction' out of the way. (It DOES undermine the argument that marriage must be between a man and a woman, and I feel glad that I can now use my personal experience to argue for same-sex marriage.)

November 2007

Getting Back Into Politics

The upcoming Australian election has gotten me back to paying attention to news and politics.

Long serving Prime Minister John Howard is up against Labor opponent Kevin Rudd this time, and polls are indicating that Rudd will win. Which is good news because it means Australia will likely pull out of the Iraq war finally.

There's recently been some controversy around Rudd's refusal to support same-sex marriage. As I understand it, Labor's platform will provide for equal rights for gay couples through both extending the nation-wide de-facto (cohabitation) relationship recognition system to all couples, and the recognition of civil union

or registered partnership systems to be set up by state governments. In other words, gay couples will have equal rights finally, but not 'marriage' itself.

It's really not surprising, given that this appears to be the most common approach among 'progressive' side major parties in the Western world at the moment. Two years ago the UK Labor government set up a civil partnership scheme for gay couples, but maintained that marriage would not change. The New Zealand Labor government also made similar moves. It's really about electoral politics, I guess. Polls have indicated 38% support for same-sex marriage in both Australia and the UK just a few years ago, and you wouldn't expect majority support at this point. We just need to take what we can, and aim to win the battle over the long run. Progress comes in steps.

The other thing that can potentially hold back same-sex marriage is the lack of enthusiasm for it among some gay activists. Both in Australia and the UK, some gay and lesbian commentators have even said that they prefer civil partnerships because they did not like the idea of 'marriage', presumably because of their own feminist or radical beliefs. Just last year some local gay groups and leaders refused to support pushing for the reform, citing other priorities. I think this attitude is unhelpful. Since some gay couples want to get married and denying them this right is discrimination based on sexual orientation, gay activist groups are indeed obliged to fight for this right, whether the leaders themselves like the idea of marriage or not! Wake up!

January 2013

What's in a Name?

As I said in my last entry, same-sex marriage is now called 'marriage equality' by most supporters and activists. The name most favoured by opponents remains 'gay marriage', which confusingly is still a name sometimes used by supporters.

There are two justifications for using 'marriage equality'. Firstly, it highlights that gay couples do not want an additional right, and are merely asking for equal treatment under the law. Secondly, it is inclusive of trans and intersex people, who may not be in a same-sex relationship but would still require legal reform to be able to marry. I think these two issues are very valid, and therefore have adopted the new term myself.

I am concerned that some activists have indeed become very 'politically correct' here though, almost as if 'same-sex marriage' and 'gay marriage' are now homophobic terms. Guess what? They are not. I remember that former Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin indeed called it 'same-sex marriage' when he presided over the reform in 2005, and UK Prime Minister David Cameron called it 'gay marriage' in his now famous speech about supporting marriage equality and his conservative values. If these are terms that our supporters use too, they should not be derided, even if they are not the best terms. Political correctness turns people off, remember.

So here is what I'll do: I will use the term 'marriage equality' myself, but defend the right of people to use 'same-sex marriage' and 'gay marriage' if they feel like it.

April 2013

The Conservative Case for Marriage Equality

New Zealand has become the second English-speaking country where marriage equality is passed under a conservative government. In fact, because unlike the UK the legislation does not need to go before the upper house for confirmation, we should probably say it's the first. The fact that this contrasts with Australia's left-wing Prime Minister Julia Gillard's refusal to support the reform has also not gone unnoticed in Australian media. It just shows that even conservatives may support marriage equality, while 'progressives' are not guaranteed to do so.

Ever since UK Prime Minister David Cameron's speech last year, where he said he supported marriage equality because he was a conservative who believed in marriage, there

has been an increased interest in the so-called conservative case for marriage equality worldwide. It's actually nothing new. I remember reading articles about this idea written by some US Republicans, going as far back as 2009. At that time, it was treated as just a curiosity. But Cameron's stance has propelled this idea into the mainstream.

I remember saying that a new approach to LGBT rights and marriage equality, where they are seen as an extension of 'family values' rather than something radical and challenging to existing society, will help the reform gain widespread support. It appears that my prediction has come true.

Meanwhile, Australia's conservative opposition party still refuses to grant their MPs a conscience vote, which actually represents the biggest roadblock to reform here. (Despite

Gillard's personal objection, most of the Labor party already support equality.) Local marriage equality activists have recently sought to bring about discussion of the conservative case for marriage equality here, in an attempt to increase conservative support and solve this impasse. I think this is a brilliant idea. Reform can only be achieved when we bring as many people together as possible, ideally from across the political spectrum. As activists often like to say, no one party can achieve marriage equality alone.

However, even the beginnings of this new phase of the marriage equality campaign has drawn fire from more radical activists. They claim that this focus will leave the more radical elements of the LGBT community behind. Guess what? Marriage is not meant for those who want radical relationships anyway, gay or straight. Those who believe in radical relationships have left marriage behind already,

in this sense. Marriage equality is mainly a reform that is important to those gay couples who want to get married, and to achieve it soon. Such couples cherish marriage, in the same way as Cameron and other conservatives do. Therefore, the conservative case for marriage equality is actually the voice of a substantial number, perhaps even the majority, of those marriage equality will affect most. I believe that radicals are in effect oppressing gay couples who believe in marriage if they disallow this voice to be heard.

October 2013

Gillard's Explanation

So former Prime Minister Julia Gillard has finally given a proper explanation as to why she does not support marriage equality. As many people suspected, it is indeed related to her 1980s style feminist views. She simply does not believe in marriage. The fact that she had never married any of her partners should have given everyone a strong hint.

Many marriage equality supporters remain disappointed in her stance. They maintain that one can choose not to participate in marriage but still offer the choice to others. But then, from my understanding, many 1980s feminists feel like they have a responsibility not to encourage marriage in any way. Furthermore, as Gillard herself suggested, historically many gay and lesbian people actually held the same

view on marriage as herself. In fact, since Gillard offered her explanation, plenty of older generation gays and lesbians have indeed 'come out' to 'cheer her on'.

Some overseas people apparently believe that all 'progressives' and all non-religious people must support marriage equality. This belief is especially common in countries like the US, where almost all opposition to marriage equality comes from the religious right. But in Gillard we have a good example of someone who opposes marriage equality on 'progressive' grounds, just like in (British PM) Cameron we have a good example of someone who supports marriage equality on conservative grounds. It just shows that marriage equality is ultimately not owned by 'progressives' alone.

November 2013

Feminism vs Marriage Equality

This is a discussion on the fact that some feminists are actively opposed to marriage equality.

Don't get me wrong. Most feminists today actively support marriage equality, in the name of advancing equality to the LGBT population.

But some don't, because they think marriage is a bad thing, so bad that nobody should have it. As a personal stance, I believe that's fine. But then, a substantial number of such feminists actually actively oppose the extension of marriage rights, almost in the same way as the religious right. For example, if they were a politician in parliament they would vote against marriage equality bills, and if there was a

referendum held they would vote no too. Some even go out of the way to make a mockery of gay couples who sincerely want to get married.

You know, feminism should be about upholding the equal rights and dignity of all people, with a particular focus on women and others denied their equality by the patriarchy. Going by that spirit, wouldn't that require supporting marriage equality, if only as equality? What you, a particular feminist, think about marriage itself is a non-issue here. The issue is that there are many gay couples out there who want to get married, and the patriarchal religious right is denying them that right. In other words, the issue is not what you, a particular feminist, think is a good choice to make, but what some LGBT people want and are currently denied.

If the feminist movement is serious about 'fighting patriarchy', it needs to be serious

about LGBT rights and equality. And if it really is serious about LGBT rights and equality, it needs to support what many LGBT people want, rather than imposing its view upon them. It's time that old-school feminists really opened up their minds and start listening.

February 2014

Growing Out Hair

As part of her transition, Maria is growing out her hair, and it's currently stuck at the length where it's very irritable.

So hair became part of our conversation today. The vast majority of trans women grow out their hair during transition. Which is probably not a surprise, as short hair is considered masculine in our society, and long hair is considered feminine. Maria, however, made the observation that many trans men didn't cut their hair for transition, as many have had short hair to begin with. The conversation then turned to why trans women don't often already have long hair to begin with, despite this being their preference.

The truth is that, when it comes to presentation, 'women' (or who society perceives to be a woman) have more freedom. Just think about it. The 'male' equivalent of a tomboy would be considered socially unacceptable in a wide variety of settings. The 'male' equivalent of butch women? I don't think I've seen one. 'Males' are practically still in the mid 20th century or so compared with women, when it comes to socially acceptable dress.

And why is this the case? Historically, both men and women were subject to oppressive gender norms in presentation, as in other areas of life. However, the feminist movement changed all that, for women. As for people who were male, the feminist movement didn't care for them much, at least not until the third wave. But even today, this glaring inequality is just accepted as normal, even by a lot of young feminists. Shouldn't a movement dedicated to

gender equality and liberation think harder, and try harder for change?

Of course, there's another very important reason why feminists should be concerned with this inequality. As women can dress butch and be respectable but men can't dress femme and be respectable, this de-facto means that masculinity is to be preferred and femininity is to be shunned. Any numerical 'equality' that feminism can win on such a playing field will be just numerical, where women can have equality, but only if we behave more like men.

March 2014

Excuses

Marriage equality has officially begun in England and Wales. Scotland is set to follow suit later this year. Nearly 20 US states are also on board now. Australia? Who knows when?

So I have been out and about, both on social media and in the real world, drumming up support and momentum for marriage equality, doing whatever one individual can about the issue. The marriage equality activists in this country are unfortunately not playing it right at the moment, in my opinion. Unlike in the US, where they are riding on the wave of momentum, here the latest action seems to be a campaign telling the whole country that 'We're Waiting'. That's really not good enough.

But what's worse are the excuses I have encountered from other activists or potential activists. They say that there are more important issues. Like homelessness - except how is that an LGBT-specific issue? Or like the inadequacy of LGBT representation in mainstream media - except how is that as important as marriage equality to the actual lives of people? I suspect that these people really do not want to fight for marriage equality at all. It's really not that surprising, when you think about it: many of the 'more radical' LGBT activists have long resisted having anything to do with marriage equality, and in recent years many have given the 'other priorities' excuse. I thought that progress on this front internationally would have changed their attitudes somewhat. But perhaps I was wrong.

This may be controversial, but let me say it: I actually think that the 'more radical' activists are dodging reality, and indulging in fantasy.

Fighting a real political fight is tough and draining work. But it has to be done, if only for the benefit of future generations. On the other hand, one can choose escapism: like saying how 'marriage is unimportant, and so I don't care about marriage equality'. Withdrawing from the civil rights battle of our time maybe an easy choice, but it's definitely an irresponsible one to make, in my strong opinion.

May 2014

The Social Justice Warrior Problem

Like many people undergoing transition, Maria has built a network of trans friends going through transition, mostly at a similar phase to herself. As I've personally experienced, it is very helpful to go through the process with other people.

However, Maria is also worried that her new friends is pressuring her to take particular political stances, and join in certain political activities, all in the name of social justice. Like myself, Maria also thinks that social justice is a good thing, but she is sceptical of her new friends' politics.

I have come to the conclusion that Maria's new friends are in fact 'social justice warriors'

(SJWs). SJWs essentially believe that all social inequalities need to be eradicated as soon as possible, and can resort to extreme, illiberal means sometimes. For example, SJWs have called for businessmen who have funded anti-marriage-equality campaigns and scientists who have made sexist comments to be sacked, and many support an increase in speech restrictions on university campuses in the name of protecting minorities. The internet and especially social media have become their favourite platform for organising and 'collective action', often in the form of sharing or retweeting similar messages together, creating a 'critical mass' that demands to be noticed.

SJWs are kind to trans people. In fact, that would be an understatement. Since they are all about protecting the welfare and equality of underprivileged people, they are very protective towards trans people. They take their opposition to transphobic behaviour and

transphobic speech extremely seriously, perhaps more than even we transpeople ourselves. It is unsurprising that a substantial number of trans people have been attracted to their ranks.

But trans-friendly as they are, Maria and I both remain sceptical of their ways. Our first criticism of them is about freedom. Oppressed minorities only found their voice and got heard due to freedom of speech in the first place, something that SJWs clearly don't cherish enough. The first people to help such oppressed minorities also often had to act against social expectations using their freedom of conscience, another thing SJWs clearly don't cherish enough. Our second criticism of them is that we fear their ways may alienate people, paradoxically entrenching racist, homophobic and transphobic attitudes. For example, in high school I had a friend who was opposed to marriage equality because he thought that it

was part of the cultural elites' way of forcing the rest of us to embrace a radical agenda. Years later he became convinced of the need for marriage equality and the importance it held for many people's lives, and today he is almost as dedicated to the cause as myself. I think that if SJWs were around in the early 2000s, their behaviour would essentially have confirmed his earlier views, and he may never have changed his mind. Our final criticism of SJWs is that they essentially aim to increase the number of rules which society has to observe. I have always had a strong view that rules often unintentionally disadvantage minorities, something that my own lived experience as a trans person has taught me.

SJWs may mean the best for us and for the world, but we really can't say that we accept their agenda in good conscience.

June 2014

Re Affirmative Action

The recent renewed interest in feminism in the Western world has reignited interest in affirmative action. There has been a new found zeal to set up affirmative action quotas where none has existed before, and to increase quotas to 50% where affirmative action already applies. (Quotas like 33% or 40% were more commonly used in the past.)

Here's a truth I haven't dared to speak up about yet: I feel quite uncomfortable about all this. Before my transition, affirmative action quotas, which never included trans people back then, were a major source of gender dysphoria for me. Nowadays, some (but not yet all) affirmative action programs include all 'non cis-men', which I think is a great improvement. But still, what about those trans women who are

still too scared to come out? I feel like supporting affirmative action means that I will be complicit in increasing their dysphoria.

Furthermore, over the years where feminists haven't been the best friends of gender non-conforming people, we trans women have instead formed alliances with other LGB and gender non-conforming people. Over the years, we have fought side-by-side for acceptance and rights. Now, should I support affirmative action programs that will leave behind those 'cis-men', who are gender non-conforming, who are often also gay, and therefore actually suffer at the hands of patriarchy, often even more so than us? I really don't feel comfortable doing so. It would feel like betraying your best friend.

I haven't spoken up because I fear that I would be seen as a traitor to the sisterhood if I did. But here's how I feel. Unfortunately, many

feminists are still quite judgemental of those
who don't think the same way as they do.
Meanwhile, real people are suffering.

August 2014

Just Blame Abbott

Recently, someone in an online discussion asked the question of why the momentum for marriage equality in Australia seems to have slowed in the past six months. The answer most people gave? Tony Abbott.

Excuse me, but I'm not aware that Tony Abbott has banned discussion on marriage equality, or that he even has the power to. It's true that the Prime Minister is not a supporter, but that's just the same as under Julia Gillard, except that we actually now have a supportive opposition leader. So how is Abbott responsible for the lack of discussion on the issue?

If Abbott is not responsible, then who is? Those who should be discussing it but are not doing

their part, of course. Every social change relies on those who believe in it to champion for it, to say the obvious. If those who claim to be supporters start dropping the ball, a rapid fall in momentum will be inevitable. For the record, I've done my part, but too many supporters have simply dropped the ball ever since Abbott came to power.

Too many so-called activists in this country would like to have their prize handed to them by the government on a silver platter, rather than going out there and putting in years of hard work to fight for it. I'm not joking here - there's been plenty who have said we should wait for Abbott to get voted out and pile the pressure on the next Labor government to deliver. They want to go about it in what they see as the 'route of least resistance'. But that's not how good activism works. You want to know why Australia is lagging behind the US on marriage equality? Let's look back to a decade

ago. Australia had Howard, the US had Bush, both were strongly opposed to marriage equality. The difference was that US activists worked hard, while Australian activists avoided the issue, mostly content to settle for the limited rights the governments had granted us. Apparently, local activists have not learnt that lesson, and are intent on wasting the 'Abbott years' as well.

I know from my personal life the importance of putting in the hard work to persuade people to change, whether you feel you are close to victory or not. Bit by bit, I brought my own family on board in my gender transition. It took years before they became accepting, but over time they did. Change is something to be created day by day, month by month, and year by year, whether it is on a personal or a political level. If you seek to wait for the 'right moment' to act, that moment will never come.

September 2014

A New Landscape for Trans Youth

Maria was talking to me yesterday, about how she hoped she could have transitioned earlier. I simply told her that it would be unwise to make a mess of one's life if the circumstances are not ready yet, and her decision to stall transition back in 2007 was the right one. Surprisingly, she told me that it wasn't even just 2007 she was talking about. She had come across several recent articles about the lives of trans teenagers nowadays, and she regrets not transitioning at their age. She went on to list the things that she 'wouldn't have had to miss out'. I had to remind her to be rational, to remember what the world was really like back when we were in high school, and how a successful transition there was very unlikely.

(Some) trans youth really have it much better nowadays. I'm not saying that there's no discrimination or bullying, because I know that would be false. (Maybe in another generations' time.) But at least they can come out (as long as their family is not super conservative), schools are often accepting, they can live authentically, and they can receive proper treatment from dedicated medical professionals. They probably still don't have an entirely 'normal' life, but at least they don't have to 'miss out on everything watching life go by' like we did.

None of us had this opportunity. But then, the world moves forward step by step, and we should be glad that the next generation gets a better deal than we did, rather than regret upon the limitations of our own lives.

Trans youth today also know that they have more opportunities than ever in life. Granted,

discrimination still exists. But when trans women are even allowed to enter Miss Universe and its associated competitions (and at least two have already done so), you feel like the sky's the limit, and don't feel like you need to compromise on your dreams that much. On a more everyday, 'realistic' level, news reports of trans people making it as professionals of all kinds, models, actors, sportspeople, even YouTube stars are becoming increasingly common. The very low 'trans ceiling' that I felt back when I was a teen has certainly been lifted much higher.

The world owes it to trans youth to not limit their life potential via discrimination and disapproval. I'm glad we're moving in the right direction.

January 2015

Becoming a Feminist

Maria had a talk with me about feminism last week. She has become a dedicated feminist, and she asked me if I identify as a feminist too. I told her I would get back to her later.

All those years ago I decided to reject feminism because it rejected me. I remember writing a diary entry about this in 2007. Essentially, feminism was a club where a large number of its members rejected transwomen back then.

But things may have changed. At least among feminists of our generation, acceptance of transwomen has become nearly universal. Moreover, many young feminists actually fight side-by-side with us on LGBT rights. And young trans-friendly feminists have become

increasingly confident about taking on transphobic feminists, even if they are otherwise long-respected figures in the movement. Partly as a result of these changes, more and more women's colleges in the US are opening their doors to transwomen for the first time.

Transwomen who want to identify as feminists today don't have to fight for their right to do so like a decade ago. They are welcomed into the feminist fold readily by the increasing majority of trans-friendly feminists.

Feminism is changing. And it's not just in relation to trans women. Marriage equality is another area where feminism is evolving. While many old school feminists like Julia Gillard oppose marriage equality, the new generation of feminists not only support marriage equality, they demand that everyone else support it too.

It is still true that some feminists, both young and old, remain sceptical of marriage. But for younger feminists, even if they don't want marriage themselves, they tend to see marriage equality as an equal rights issue rather than an endorsement of marriage itself.

Moreover, it has become 'fashionable' to identify as a feminist again, probably for the first time since the 1970s. Celebrities and popstars are increasingly identifying as feminists, and their popularity have generally increased if they do so. In contrast to a decade ago, nobody questions if feminism is still relevant nowadays.

All this just shows that feminism, like everything else, is not fixed through time. So should I reassess my approach to feminism? I think it's time I did so.

At the core of it, feminism is just about gender equality. I guess I can call myself a feminist if this is what I believe in. It's OK that I don't agree with many feminists over many issues. Many young feminists disagree with Germaine Greer over trans issues and disagree with Julia Gillard over marriage equality too. It doesn't mean they can't be part of the movement. Feminism is not a political party with a black-and-white platform, after all.

April 2015

Pronoun Rounds

Today I attended one of the LGBT support meetings Maria regularly goes to, because I was invited to talk to several trans people there about what life feels like in the long term after transitioning.

You know, before this invitation, I had never even thought about 'how life is like now that I'm long-term post-transition'. It's not something you naturally think about. Life just goes on, and whatever new features of life that came about as a result of transition gradually becomes the 'new normal'. Furthermore, while I don't feel 'gender dysphoria' anymore, my life is still quite similar to the way it was before transition, except for gender-specific features.

So there really isn't much to talk or think about. But then, I realised that this is exactly what some people in transition need to hear from people like me: they want to know that there is a future after transition, that life can feel 'normal' and just right.

Attending the meeting itself was quite an experience for me, something unexpected. While this was a regular support meeting for LGBT young adults in the area, trans people did make up nearly a fifth of those in attendance. This stands in contrast to my experience with the so-called LGBT support groups and services that I came into contact with during transition. Back then, they had generally not even seen a trans person, and I became fed up with having to explain myself eventually. Statistically, this change would also likely mean that many more trans people have come out in the past decade. I calculated that if the proportion of gay people vs trans people in this sample is reflective of the

wider reality, then trans people would actually have a frequency of about 1 in 500, many times more than previous reports. In fact, I wonder if there are actually many more trans people than we believed there were all along, with many just hiding in fear or unaware of their true identity all along.

Another interesting feature of the meeting was that it started with a 'name and pronoun round', where everyone introduced themselves providing their name and pronoun. It was the first time I had seen something like this. So here was a solution that can solve all the pronoun problems trans people have ever encountered! I'm still unsure if this is going to be realistic to apply in the wider world where the vast majority of people aren't trans. But then, I was told by someone there that this practice is actually also being introduced in some college-level debating tournaments. Apparently, another reason was that some people wished

to be referred to as 'they' rather than a gender-specific pronoun.

October 2015

More on Social Justice Warriors

I don't agree with the agenda of the social justice warriors (SJWs). Previously in this diary, I gave my reasons for this decision. It's not that I don't agree with the idea of social justice or the need to address bigotry. It's just that I believe in using more 'liberal' and 'rational' methods.

Recently, an SJW asked me what I think of the anti-SJW movement, and how I can in my good conscience let these people use their 'freedom of speech' to encourage hate and bigotry. I have indeed come across some of the things people have said in the name of 'protecting freedom of speech' against SJWs. And trust me, there's plenty of racist, sexist, homophobic and transphobic things they have said, some of which are quite hurtful to me personally as a trans person.

I do not support the self-proclaimed anti-SJW movement. But then I do support freedom of speech, and the existence of this noisy minority is not going to change my mind. My belief is that whenever people 'use' their freedom of speech to spread false or hateful statements, it is our responsibility to stand up for truth and equality, using our own freedom of speech. For example, while it hurts me to hear someone say that 'trans women are not real women', I am strong and rational enough to argue confidently as to why they are wrong. I believe that while these arguments may be painful, they are something we need to have, in order to progress society. While I cannot in good conscience support the SJW movement in its current form, I will wholeheartedly support an alternative movement that seeks to address misunderstandings and spread the message of equality and acceptance using our freedom of speech.

Sometimes I wonder if SJWs act the way they do because they don't have faith in the liberal and rational approach to progress society. They see that there is still plenty of bigotry around, and think that the only way to truly change things is via more radical action. But from my own personal experience, change comes in steps, and things are already getting better all the time, proving that the liberal and rational approach actually works. Today's discussion about trans rights draws from discussions about gay rights and women's rights society has already had, which in turn have drawn on the idea that everyone should be equal, something once considered radical but is generally accepted today. Today's marriage equality movement builds on the gradual increase in gay rights, including importantly the civil union and de-facto rights type reforms gained in the previous decade, and the increasing consensus that LGBT relationships are part of the fabric of

families that form society. At each step along the way, we need to secure the changes we can, and continue to push society along through ongoing liberal and rational discussion. Radical action undermines our ability to do these things, therefore I believe it is ultimately unhelpful.

January 2016

What If Stealth Disappeared?

Traditionally, many trans people chose to live in stealth mode - that is, post transition, they don't let people know they are trans at all. Stealth comes in many 'levels'. On a most 'shallow' level, you could even say I live in stealth mode 90% of the time, simply because I don't tell people that I'm trans generally, even though I have never attempted to actively deny it either. Most definitions of stealth however describe an existence where one actively prevents others from knowing their trans history, for example by fabricating a gender appropriate cis (i.e. non-trans) past. On the deepest level there is 'deep stealth', where possibly even one's partner does not know.

By definition, nobody knows how many people choose to live in stealth.

But recently, some trans people are wondering where the opportunity to live in stealth is disappearing. Firstly, everything has become computerised and records are easily traced. The popularity of social media also means that one's past cannot be easily completely hidden. Secondly, trans awareness has increased greatly in the general population in just the past few years, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to 'pass' 100% of the time. Recently, there have even been quite a few stories of genetic women being misidentified as trans! Remember, just one or two failures to pass can make stealth mode unravel completely.

I agree that the opportunity to live in stealth is fast fading away. But I don't think it's something we need to regret. Many trans people only 'chose' to live in stealth in the past due to the kind of discrimination they would

face otherwise. In a society increasingly accepting of trans people, why would we want to live in stealth? I mean, it involves being 'fake', like being in a new closet, and makes one's life very paranoid in general. In an era where the vast majority of gay and lesbian people come out and live authentically, wouldn't living in stealth be contrary to this spirit of authenticity and acceptance for all?

I think stealth isn't something we should cherish or celebrate at all. It was just a necessity of life for many trans people historically. With the evolution of society towards accepting trans people wholeheartedly, one day, hopefully soon, nobody will feel the need to live in stealth.

February 2016

My Feminism Anniversary

A week ago was my one year anniversary of deciding to embrace feminism. Here are some reflections.

What finally made me able to embrace feminism was the more inclusive form of feminism that I encountered from some in recent years. For too long, I had felt that feminism was somehow exclusive of people like me on many levels, and even with the more trans-friendly style in recent years, I had felt that to be a feminist would be like joining a political party, and having to toe the party line. This really wasn't something I can take. While I was happy that the trans-friendly feminists appeared to have generally won the debate within feminism by early this decade, the whole thing still seemed too much like individuals

trying to bring a reluctant political party along to embrace change, like more enlightened members trying to bring a conservative party to reluctantly accept marriage equality. This, for me, reinforced the view that joining feminism is like joining a political party even more than anything else.

But more recently, I realised that real feminism isn't that 'political party'. While some feminists have unfortunately overly politicised the whole idea and have also policed acceptable stances to take, this really shouldn't be how the concept of feminism operates. And while I am totally put off by this reality, it shouldn't be a barrier for me to embrace what feminism really is: that is, a movement where women and gender minority voices can get heard, and society can be changed to make things more equal. I have become a feminist, but I will never join that 'political party' and toe that party line, because to me, that would be betraying the

real idea of feminism. I hope that more feminists can reflect on this idea, too.

The other thing that used to irritate me about feminism was the elitist attitude, or the 'mother knows best' attitude among many old-school feminists. It's like how they cannot just decide not to marry themselves, they have to effectively join forces with the religious right to prevent LGBT couples from marrying too. It's also like how they used to decide that trans people don't exist, until it became too hard to deny. As somebody who is committed to freedom, whose such commitment comes from a lifetime of being hurt by rules, red-tape and hierarchies who enforce these things, down to even such mundane detail as school uniforms, I just could not bring myself to support any movement in which an elite gets to decide for everyone else and impose rules others have to follow. The 'mother knows best' of some feminists is really no better than the 'father

knows best' of patriarchy. But again, this is not real feminism, just another sad reality we need to overcome.

Real, liberal, feminism should be about listening to the real voices, needs and wishes of women and LGBTs, and find solutions to move forward that enhance liberty and equality, and are inclusive of all. If feminism is serious about looking after minorities' equal rights, then we need to be inclusive, listen to and be empathetic with even the most minority concerns. We need to have conversations about issues all the time. We need to engage everyone, and not have any taboos at all. Above all, we need to maintain an open mind to truly listen.

March 2016

Maria Completes Transition

A few weeks ago Maria told me she felt that her transition was generally done, and today I treated her to a lunch to celebrate this milestone in her life.

We discussed how her experience of transition was. While gender transition is often an emotional rollercoaster and Maria's was no exception, she thought that the experience was mostly positive.

A major difference between my transition and Maria's was that she never felt any of the isolation and 'surreal' feelings that I had. I guess it really helps that nowadays everyone understands what trans is, and many people (and most of our generation) are accepting.

Being trans is increasingly becoming a normal part of everyday life, and not a weird or surreal experience a small minority has to go through alone. You know that's true when newspapers and entertainment magazines discuss trans issues respectfully and not infrequently. Trans people also don't feel like they have to explain themselves as much nowadays. When Maria went through her document changes, she didn't worry about whether the staff would be surprised or give her trouble. Trans people changing their documents are a relatively common thing nowadays, and department websites even have clear instructions about it most of the time.

Transition is still not easy. But it's usually less difficult than just a decade ago.

Going forward, I can see a time where social acceptance and understanding means that

transition is not much of a hassle anymore. Like how coming out as gay is already not much of a big deal in some especially enlightened sections of society. I know it's going to take some time, but I am hopeful.

June 2016

Erasing Gender Boundaries

A high school here in Sydney has become the first to announce a new uniform policy where there are no gender boundaries, i.e. where all students can choose the pants uniform or the skirt uniform. This has predictably caused some controversy and outrage from conservative sections of society. But I do welcome this development. After all, it would have been what I wanted when I was in high school. Even if it's far too late for me to have this opportunity, I am happy for other trans people to have it.

I believe in erasing unnecessary gender boundaries. This doesn't mean people won't be able to continue to identify as male or female clearly and exclusively. It just means that we don't have to create rigid rules around it as a

society. Some people are fearful of this kind of change, but what's there to fear about, really? It's almost as irrational as a fear of same-sex marriages, which was quite common just a decade ago.

Just like marriage equality, erasing unnecessarily rigid gender boundaries won't mean any trouble to anybody, but would mean a world of difference to a few. It would make trans people's lives so much easier.

July 2016

Front Page for Marriage Equality

Today (July 2) is election day in Australia, and the newspapers have come out with a final round of polls and endorsements. While the polls for the election itself remains in dead heat territory, one newspaper had conducted a poll regarding marriage equality along with their final election polls, and found that 70% of respondents were in support. Consequently, the newspaper has said, on its front page no less, that whoever wins government, this is the one thing we surely want from both of them.

In this election, all three major party leaders are supporters of marriage equality, for the first time ever. There are differences in their approach to the issue, regarding whether it should be put to a plebiscite (public vote, like a referendum) or just a vote in parliament, and

this may spell some short term trouble in the next year or so. But all three leaders are committed supporters, still. Therefore, I remain optimistic that we will get there soon enough.

But the most striking thing is that, marriage equality has gone from the issue that progressive politicians avoid and conservative politicians use to wedge them just a decade ago, to an cause with widespread mainstream support, even deserving of a front page newspaper endorsement on election day. It is due to supporters making their case again and again, changing minds everywhere they go, that we have come to this point. It just shows that, if you open up a conversation and put up a persuasive case, while respectfully addressing the concerns sceptics have too, you can change a lot in even just a decade. The marriage equality movement is indeed a model other social movements should learn from.

August 2016

No Labels

Recently, at least two female celebrities who are dating other women have refused to put a label on their relationship or their sexuality. This has started a discussion in the wider community: is it necessary to have labels? After all, people who are heterosexual don't have to emphasize that they are 'straight', and don't have to particularly label their relationship as a 'straight relationship'.

I agree. While I think that labels need not be abandoned because they are useful descriptors, it is actually unfair to expect gay couples to wear the 'gay' label if we don't expect heterosexual couples to wear the 'straight' label.

Furthermore, I think it may apply to trans people too. Not every trans person wants to wear the 'trans' label. Some do so proudly, but not everyone. So if a trans person wants to be 'just a boy', 'just a girl', or even 'just a person', I think everyone should respect it.

September 2016

LGBT Identity and Political Affiliation

The results of the Australian election are that the conservative government, headed by moderate (i.e. not conservative) Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has been narrowly returned. This time there are also six LGBT members of parliament, more than ever before. I think that's worth celebrating in and of itself. However, not all LGBT advocates are celebrating, because four of the six are on the conservative side of politics.

This reminds me of the attitude some activists have towards Caitlyn Jenner, who supports the Republican Party. When some leftist LGBTs learned of her political orientation and beliefs, they almost immediately withdrew their initial supportive stance towards her. I think it's sad.

Some left-wing LGBT activists have a habit of hating on LGBTs who don't side with the left politically. Their attitude is that LGBTs who support the right are 'traitors' to our community. While it is true that the left has provided us with more legal rights and respect than the right historically, this attitude is something I find really problematic.

LGBTs are people too, and I think we can all agree that everyone deserves equal rights and opportunities in life, in every area. If LGBTs are only allowed to support or join particular political parties, how can you call that equality? The LGBT movement also prides itself on encouraging people to be authentic. Wouldn't you think that, statistically, there would have to be a substantial number of LGBTs whose authentic political orientation is on the right side of the spectrum?

Furthermore, strategically it would also make sense to have right-wing LGBTs in politics, so that we can engage with both sides of politics. As the marriage equality battles have shown, we need plenty of support from both sides of politics if we are to win reforms. While it is expected that more of the support would come from the left side of politics, we still need plenty of right-wing support.

Finally, let me say this to the aforementioned leftist activists: if you moved to a parallel universe where it is the right wing who are the primary champions of LGBT rights, will you be able to just change all your political beliefs and allegiances to fit this reality? And if you decide to still stay with the left and work for change from within, how will you feel if others label you as a 'traitor'?

p.s. a similar phenomenon can also be observed in feminism, unfortunately. According to some feminists, you can't be a good feminist if you are politically right-wing, opposed to affirmative action, pro-life (even if it's just a personally held religious belief), or, in some ridiculous cases, even if you don't believe in man-made climate change. While we are personally free to agree or disagree with any of the aforementioned stances (I certainly disagree with some of them myself), they should not be grounds to be shut out of the feminist movement. Every criticism of the narrowness of some in the LGBT rights movement in this entry can also apply to some feminists, unfortunately, and this needs to change. Both LGBT rights and feminism can only become stronger when the tent is big enough to include everyone who is pro-queer and pro-women, and is also big enough to include all sorts of ideas and ideals.

Chapter 3

How Liberal Feminism, Part I

Taken from **Liberal Revival Now: A Moral and Practical Case for a 21st Century Back-to-Basics Liberalism**

Many people identify as liberal feminists already, and the label has been attached to all sorts of viewpoints. Like liberalism itself, liberal feminism can mean almost anything nowadays. But just as I have stressed the importance of finding and reviving real liberalism, we must find and revive 'real' liberal feminism. What is 'real' liberal feminism then? Basically, I believe that real liberal feminism is the feminism that seeks freedom and equality for all, nothing more, nothing less. It doesn't care about what the (feminist) establishment viewpoint is, or what the majority of the 'movement' currently believes in or wants. Real liberal feminism, like real liberalism, is not a political party with a party line that all must toe. Real liberal feminism, like all real liberalism, is an ongoing project to make things more free and opportunities more equal.

Of course, in a free society, there will be a diversity of lifestyles, beliefs and aspirations.

Therefore, liberal feminism must necessarily be a broad tent, inclusive of people of various political and religious views, and inclusive of people who have different opinions on how gender freedom and equality should be best advanced. Liberal feminism should therefore be inclusive of progressives and conservatives, pro-life and pro-choice, the religious, agnostic and atheist, female and male, and feminine and masculine alike, and seek the freedom and equality of all these people equally and justly. Liberal feminism also therefore should not be biased towards a specific political affiliation, lifestyle or worldview. For example, it should not as a movement, be partial to either capitalism or socialism, coerce women to choose full-time work if this is not what they want, or even set particular goals like women should have the same workforce participation rate as men. Instead, liberal feminism's job is to listen to everyone's values and aspirations, and help everyone get empowered. For example, a liberal feminist should support the increased

provision of childcare, because it empowers career women. But she should also support stay-at-home mothers getting adequate recognition in society, and enabling more women to choose this path should they wish to.

Liberal feminism's pure freedom and equality approach, as well as its dedication to be inclusive and supportive of all, also means that it is well placed to deal with intersectionality issues. For example, I cannot imagine liberal feminism having a difficult time with the inclusion of trans people or lesbian couples who wish to get married, difficulties that have divided and harmed the image of many parts of mainstream feminism in recent years.

Intersectional feminism fundamentally requires the inclusion and respect of minority voices and experiences, and a liberal environment where every viewpoint and background is equally welcome will truly provide intersectional freedom and equality. Furthermore, real liberal

feminism, like all real liberalism, should be about respecting the equal moral agency of each and every individual. Only when this principle is truly upheld and practiced will minorities within minorities ceased to be shoved aside and doubly (or triply) disadvantaged.

One final point is that real liberal feminism is NOT identity politics, but rather, a form of liberalism in practice that is informed by real people's lived experience with regards to gender-based freedom and equality. The fact that some forms of feminism have taken on an identity politics colour has fuelled the common perception that feminism is about boys vs girls. And this identity politics focus has also meant that those forms of feminism has served to only 'improve equality' for some, but not for others. For example, sometimes only straight, white women are included, sometimes only cis-women are included, and almost always

feminine men and androgynous queer people are not included. Instead of striving for real gender-based freedom and equality across society, identity politics feminism strives for the empowerment of only a certain group of people, while being happy to leave others doubly disadvantaged at the hands of both the patriarchy and themselves. This is another place where real liberal feminism is clearly superior.

Chapter 4

How Liberal Feminism, Part II

The following are further excerpts from **Liberal Revival Now**

The discussion is about liberalism in general, but all these concepts can and should be applied to liberal feminism. As liberalism is already universal, there is no need to rewrite liberal theories and ideas specifically for applying to feminism, just like there is no need to reinvent the idea of freedom of speech for each kind of speech one may encounter in society.

What is Liberalism?

What does liberal mean? There can be no agreement, it seems. To some, especially in the US, it is synonymous with progressive and the left. In fact, some conservatives have come to believe that liberalism is merely a moderate form of socialism, synonymous with big government. (NOTE for US readers: Liberalism has never meant governments spending 'liberally', despite what some conservatives may tell you.) In contrast, the Liberal Party of Australia is generally regarded as a centre-right party, and is said to have liberal and conservative elements, united by their opposition to unions and big government. Meanwhile, the libertarians sometimes like to say that they are the real liberals, because they are the only ones who are absolutely for small government, under all circumstances.

Does Liberalism Still Mean Anything, Then?

But still, liberalism is not socialism or conservatism, no matter how it is implemented. Since liberalism has its limits, it must mean something. There must be something in common between Clinton and Turnbull that Sanders and Abbott simply don't share, even though they are technically on opposite sides of the political spectrum. (And I am not saying that I don't like Sanders, or don't agree with Sanders or Abbott sometimes, it's just that they are not liberals.)

If liberals, left-liberals and right-liberals alike, share something in common, it's the fundamental belief in liberty. Liberalism is unlike any other ideology, in that it does not seek to use government to social engineer a certain type of society. Right-liberals or

libertarians simply don't believe in government intervention, and if left-liberals believe in government intervention, it's for the sake of liberty. At the heart of liberalism, I believe, is the value that all people are morally equal, i.e. they have an equal right to be moral actors. And in the clear absence of a morally perfect person anywhere in the world, this is simply the only moral and logical position to take. Furthermore, as all human beings are morally flawed in one way or another, allowing the beliefs and practices of one group of human beings to be shoved down other people's throats will inevitably lead to the triumph of immorality over morality at some point. Therefore, it is a great moral imperative that we have a consensus where everyone has the equal right to act upon their own moral compass.

Liberals can be personally conservative, progressive or radical, but they do not use the

government to engineer a conservative, progressive or radical society. Those who do are simply not liberals. Take same-sex marriage for example. Liberals who personally believe that marriage is between a man and a woman would nevertheless not use government power to prevent or frustrate same-sex marriages, and liberals who strongly believe in marriage equality would nevertheless refrain from using government power to force the rest of society to act consistently with their beliefs. Those on either side of these limits, e.g. those who believe marriage licences should not be available to same-sex couples as a matter of law, and those who believe businesses should face fines for refusing to participate in same-sex weddings, cannot really be called liberal.

Why Liberalism

Now that we have established what liberalism is, we then need to ask the question, why liberalism and not other ideologies?

I have studied all sorts of ideologies, from Communism to Christian Reconstructionism, from Anarcho-Capitalism to the Neoreaction. But liberalism remains unique. It is the only ideology that truly respects the idea that everyone is morally equal, and the rest of liberalism follows logically from this point. Only when the idea that everyone is morally equal is upheld can there be a true lack of oppression in society. Therefore, liberalism is also the only ideology that never oppresses people.

Liberalism vs Progressivism

Many liberally-inclined people like to say they are 'progressive' nowadays, and some even believe the two terms have become interchangeable. The preference for 'progressive' comes from a variety of sources: in the US, 'liberal' has, at the hands of conservatives, become falsely defined as 'governments who spend liberally', and is therefore avoided by many who don't believe in economically socialist governments. In Australia and Canada, Liberal (with a capital-L) is the name of a political party, and using that label may sound partisan, and, in the case of Australia, can have connotations of being conservative (as the Liberal Party of Australia is a center-right party). And finally, there are plenty of 'progressives' who are not necessarily liberals.

In fact, liberals are not necessarily always progressive on every issue, and progressives are not always liberal either. In history, some 'progressives' have been associated with the prohibition of alcohol in the US as well as eugenics, neither of which are very liberal. In more modern times, some 'progressives' have been associated with banning the use of plastic bags, limiting free speech to protect minorities, promoting identity politics, engaging in social justice warrior style actions that have made their opponents lose their private sector jobs, and accusing people of 'cultural appropriation', all of which are not compatible with true liberalism. This is actually not surprising, as progressivism is about progressing society towards a kind of utopian vision agreed upon by progressives, and liberalism is about maximising people's liberty in a way that recognises their equality as moral actors. The two may naturally coincide on some issues but not others. That the two are, politically speaking, both opposed to statist conservatism

also doesn't mean they should always agree otherwise.

The kind of 'utopia' envisioned by 'progressives' is clearly not just one where people have maximal freedom, as the above examples demonstrate. For example, while liberals uphold equality before the law and are dedicated to the removal of discrimination against minorities, some progressives go even further and demand that the majority do not hurt the feelings of minorities in their speech, something that liberals cannot support because of the principles of freedom of speech and conscience. While liberals may support or oppose affirmative action based on competing demands of 'absolute liberty' vs 'equal opportunity' and hence 'effective liberty', some progressives believe that affirmative action with high targets are needed to offset historical discrimination as a matter of promoting intergenerational justice, something not

considered relevant to the idea of liberty. Furthermore, the issue of 'cultural appropriation' is one where liberals and some progressives stand in necessary opposition. For a liberal, people should be free to express any idea, perhaps except where it would incite violence, which works of art that 'culturally appropriate' generally do not. Therefore, liberals should always support the right to create art that may have elements of 'cultural appropriation'. However, some progressives believe that 'cultural appropriation' is either unjust in and of itself or offend the feelings of cultural minorities and therefore should not be allowed to occur. In short, 'progressivism' is often based upon complex, and sometimes subjective and controversial, notions of justice, and where this requirement of justice is in competition with the concept of liberty, liberty is often sacrificed.

But this sacrifice of liberty is in fact dangerous. If progressives believe that liberty should sometimes be disallowed for a higher moral good, so do conservatives, although usually on different issues. For example, many conservatives oppose same-sex marriage and adoption because they believe heterosexual families to be better. Of course, this very idea is offensive to progressives. Arguments like that have meant that the Western world is consistently engaging in a culture war with itself with no end in sight. Usually, conservatives and progressives both win and lose some things, and nobody is happy at all. Liberalism provides the necessary circuit breaker, so that we can all live in peace again and go back to focussing on common priorities, like the economy and providing opportunities for our young people. Liberalism holds that while progressives and conservatives can promote their beliefs and argue over them, neither side is entitled to use government powers to enforce their position. This means

conservatives cannot ban gay adoptions, and progressives cannot ban speech that offends minorities. It means that progressives cannot demand works of art that 'culturally appropriate' be removed from an art gallery, and conservatives cannot demand the removal of artwork that celebrates gay pride. People are still entitled to their morals, but nobody is able to shove it down others' throats.

Moreover, today's progressives can easily become tomorrow's conservatives, as society changes and adaptations are required. If today's progressives decide to limit freedom based on their perception of what is progressive, it may mean an uneven playing field tilted in favour of tomorrow's conservatives. History has shown that, given enough time, authoritarian societies generally become the more conservative ones, and often maladaptively conservative, even if they started out intending to be progressive.

In fact, one can still be a progressive (or even a conservative) while being a liberal, one just cannot be both liberal and condone the use of state power to enforce their own moral views. Progressives can still defend the rights of minorities or speak out about 'cultural appropriation' if they wish to. Looking around the world, there is indeed good reason why it would be smart for progressives to side with liberals rather than statist. The vast majority of countries still ban same-sex marriage and adoption, for example. Embracing state enforcement of morals legitimises their justification for doing so, i.e. that the majority of their citizens believe such discriminatory legislation to be morally necessary. Likewise, some countries still maintain many legal disabilities for women, saying that this is necessary to maintain their virtue and to maintain social stability. And even in the West, progressives have not always won political

battles. That they are winning more battles recently should not distract them from the fact that even some very recent eras (including the era of Bush Jr, just a decade ago) were full of setbacks for progressives. Moreover, the fact that progressives inevitably win some battles and lose others to conservatives means that embracing the use of state power inevitably results in some people being 'left behind', and 'leaving behind' some people in the pursuit of social change is simply unacceptable to many progressives. Progressives should therefore prefer a society with a liberal (rather than a statist) consensus, one where they wouldn't be able to change the world overnight with the stroke of the President's pen, but one where at least nobody can shove their beliefs, religious or otherwise, down others' throats. In such a society, while it would be impossible to force everyone to live the progressive way, individuals and communities can at least be able to comfortably live out the progressive

ideology without fear of government interference (same for conservatives, actually).

There's also an argument to be made that liberal progressivism is, in the long run, more effective at actual social change than statist progressivism. With liberal progressivism, there is plenty of opportunity for persuasion and changing minds. Respect for each other's consciences means that such discussion can occur without one side being fearful of the agenda of the other side. In this environment, new ideas can be effectively considered, more so than when it is imposed top down, to be obeyed like it or not. The story of marriage equality in the West is testament to this: surveys in the US, UK and Australia all found that support was below 40% as recently as 2004, but then conversations changed people's minds, and dramatically so in just a decade. On the other hand, the story of feminism in formerly Communist Eastern Europe tell

another story. Women's equality was often imposed top-down by communist bureaucrats, and when communism washed out of the system, so did gender equality. In fact, many of those countries have been rendered to be so suspicious of change they have become conservative strongholds. It shows that real change can only come from real agreement to change, and this can only come from having tough, but necessary conversations.

Liberalism vs Authoritarianism

Note: authoritarianism as used in this chapter covers all ideologies that do not embrace the idea of liberal democracy, and depend on authoritarian policies driven by 'strong leaders' with great power. It includes fascism, theocracy, Christian reconstructionism, populist authoritarianism, absolute monarchy, as well as lesser-known ideologies like the neoreaction.

Supporters of authoritarian ideologies do not like the twin ideals of liberty and democracy. They think that these concepts should be abolished. But if they really do have the convictions of their beliefs, they should be OK with living in the society they are currently living in. Why do I say this? Think about it. If they are OK with their society and their lives being controlled by a powerful someone-else, then that is not too dissimilar to what they are

already experiencing. It's just that the someone-else in question is not to their liking. But that should be beside the point, as in their proposal, nobody gets to choose that someone-else ruling over them anyway. Therefore, if these (generally right wing) authoritarians do not like their current government, then they should either suck it up or move elsewhere (generally the solution they give for those who don't like the governance of the country they were born in).

But it appears that this will not satisfy them. This means that, deep in their hearts, authoritarians actually believe that they should get to choose, but others should not. But why this, and not the other way around? Why should right-wing authoritarians get to choose a right-wing dictator, rather than, say, radical feminist authoritarians choosing a radical feminist autocrat? And if the core reason is that right-wing authoritarians believe that this

would make society better, then I believe that radical feminists would say the same too. Authoritarians may also think that they are the smarter ones, so they should get to choose. But then there is the impossibility of having a test of intelligence that everyone can agree to as fair. For example, while some right-wing authoritarians may say that IQ tests have shown themselves to be intelligent, left-wing activists may counter that by saying their attitude to social problems show that they have an underdeveloped understanding of the social world, and therefore regarding the kind of intelligence needed for deciding who gets to rule, they simply have none. Another authoritarian appeal is via tradition, that those who are traditionally born to rule (i.e. offspring of past Kings) or those who would uphold tradition (including religious laws) should rule. But as the previous chapter on conservatism demonstrated, determining the application of tradition in a changing world is itself a controversial process, and one that would split

traditionalists themselves. This has been a particular problem for theocracies, demonstrated in history by the repeated splits of the Christian church, and more recently by the splits in many denominations over the issue of same-sex marriage.

If only some get to choose the leadership of the country, it doesn't necessarily mean it's going to be you, or that your choice will prevail. In any case, those who do not get the leader they want will cry unfair, anyway. In many cases too they would want to take action to change things. Hence the high number of coups in dictatorships and monarchies, compared to the relative stability of democratic government. Liberal democracy avoids the problem of 'who gets to choose' by recognising that everyone has equal moral authority, and therefore all adult citizens get to have an equal say in the choice of their government. Simple, satisfying and stable.

But then, right-wing authoritarians must, by definition, dislike the government that they got via the democratic process. But rather than turning to the fantasy of authoritarianism (and let's face it, it's a fantasy that can't come true easily, especially if they can't even get their fellow citizens to vote for someone they would prefer as President), liberalism has a more practical answer for them. Liberalism, upon which liberal democracy is based, recognises that all citizens have an equal moral right to their conscience, as previously mentioned. This should, in theory, mean that governments should be as ideologically neutral as possible, and afford its citizens the maximum amount of freedom consistent with maintaining the freedom of other citizens and maintaining national security. In theory, this also means that citizens and voluntary communities of citizens are free to live out whatever ideology they want to, as long as it does not affect other

people who have not volunteered to participate. Whenever this is not actually the case, and let's face it, there are plenty of times in the so-called liberal West where this is not the case, it is a lack of liberalism rather than a surplus that is the cause. So whenever right-wing authoritarians complain that they can't live a certain way because of the actions of a left-wing democratically elected government, they should champion for an increase in liberalism rather than the opposite. They should remind their government that their mandate is based on the idea of democracy, which in turn is based on the idea of every citizen having an equal moral right, which in turn demands that governments accord their citizens maximal freedom no matter the ideology of the people in office.

On the other hand, of course unlike in authoritarians' own fantasies, they do not get to dictate the behaviour of the rest of society.

But that's only fair. And it's only in a society where nobody gets to dictate to anyone else where they are safe from being dictated to by radical feminists (going back to my first example) or any other group they don't like. So the system they hate so much protects them, as much as anyone else. While everyone gets to persuade others to come aboard their ship, nobody gets to drag people on board. Isn't this fair, though?

Some authoritarians propose a model where people do not have a guarantee of civil liberties or the right to vote their government out, but where they do have the right to exit, i.e. to leave the country if they want to. Well, I guess that option is already available for these people too, so why are they still complaining? There are plenty of places which are not liberal democracies they can move to. If the right to leave could be easily exercised in real life, we would also likely see many people move across

borders after each election. The reason why this never happens is simple: people have their family and friends, their jobs and their homes physically located in their home country. Therefore, the right to leave is like the right to live in a palace if you can afford one: it theoretically exists but doesn't in reality for most people. On the other hand, liberalism allows for the freedom of individuals and communities to arrange their own affairs the way they like it. Therefore, liberalism, by definition, should allow for the co-existence of multiple voluntary values-based communities within one physical country, and allows each of these communities essentially the right to self-governance according to their ideology, as long as it does not infringe on others' rights or on national security. It therefore allows people the true freedom to choose their community and cultural governance.

Liberalism vs Identity Politics

Identity politics are politics that revolve around a person's identity, for example their race, their gender or their sexual orientation.

Liberalism is incompatible with identity politics. Liberalism fundamentally believes in the moral equality of persons, as well as the logical consequence that each shall be given the maximum level of liberty possible. Therefore, it is incompatible with any type of politics that pit one group against another, be it male vs female, white vs black, or gay vs straight. In liberalism, we are all naturally equal, and we should all seek freedom for ourselves as well as for each other. Seeking rights just for those with similar characteristics to oneself is incompatible with this vision.

And liberalism is superior to identity politics. Liberalism is one ideology that guarantees the rights and freedoms of all groups, majority or minority, even groups whose identities have yet to form properly, who are yet to have any political demands. Instead of fighting each other for rights, liberalism says that we can come together and agree that the right to life and liberty is important for all. The voices and stories of minorities are important for the development of liberalism and liberal policies, as they can inform of the blind spots other liberals, not being certain minorities, often overlook. For example, before gay voices became prominent in culture and politics, it did not occur to most liberals the need for same-sex marriage. But once the argument was made, most liberals wholeheartedly embraced the reform, just as they embraced the civil rights movement a generation earlier, and women's suffrage another generation earlier. Policy cannot ever be completely liberal without listening to minority voices.

On the other hand, minority voices are wasted in pointless battles by engaging in identity politics. Rather than just liberty and moral equality being pitched against tyranny, women's rights are pitched against men's rights, black rights are pitched against white rights, and gay rights are pitched against straight rights. Moreover, fear of splits in each identity group further diminishes effectiveness for reform. For example, during the 2000s, while liberals, gay and straight alike, have rapidly embraced marriage equality, the gay political community itself remained divided on the issue until very recently, due to the idea of 'competing priorities' as well as the fact that some radicals just didn't like the idea of the more conservative section of their community embracing an institution that they hated. Concerns over division meant that some gay rights organisations were not keen on participating in the fight for marriage equality

as recently as 2010, while straight liberals (and 'progressives') were already in full battle-mode over this issue.

The Way Forward

The recent decades of culture wars in the West have meant that society is now divided along lines of cultural tribes. More broadly speaking there's the progressives vs the conservatives, and in a more detailed analysis we have the various sub-groups encouraged by identity politics often fighting against each other. In this war-like environment, the ideal of 'I may not agree with what you say, but I will fight to my death for your right to say it' has been lost.

The current generation of young adults are one of the most politically involved generations ever. Not since the era of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement have both college campuses and Hollywood been so political. For a lot of young adults, their involvement in politics is mainly to fight the racist, sexist, homophobic and pro-war agenda, in the name

of 'justice'. To this end, many have aligned with so-called 'progressives', who have had varying levels of success in changing society in the way the majority of young adults want. But these 'progressives' often also employ illiberal methods in their bid to change society, and the impatient younger generation are often all too willing to follow suit, seemingly unaware of the implications of encouraging an illiberal culture. Such methods include 'shutting down' rather than debating their opponents, creating taboos around the discussion of certain topics and the ample use of social punishments for those who violate them, and even calling for the sacking of academics and CEOs alike who espouse opinions they don't like. Meanwhile, reactionary conservatives fight back using similarly illiberal methods, further fuelling the anger of the young and progressive. And so the cycle goes on.

Another reason why so many progressive young adults embrace illiberal progressivism is because they know of no alternative. Few have been educated on what liberalism actually is, and the ideals contained in the long history of the liberal canon. Still fewer are aware of how such ideals may be applied in today's society, and how liberalism can be the best way to end racism, sexism and homophobia. Furthermore, the far left have been sending out the message that liberals who respect freedom of speech and freedom of conscience are simply gutless to take on bigots or otherwise not serious enough about social justice, and young adults impatient for change swallow up these ideas all too quickly. That they don't understand the strong ideological grounding of liberalism, and the grand vision it ultimately has for society, allows them to believe these lies.

On the other hand, more conservatively inclined people, young and older alike, are

getting increasingly fed up with illiberal progressivism. While many would have liked to just be left alone to live their own life, the fact that illiberal progressives would not allow this has meant that more and more natural conservatives have embraced increasingly reactionary ideologies. The movement of individuals with strong non-politically-correct stances from the libertarian camp towards populist conservatism or even the neoreaction movement has become increasingly common. The failure of liberalism to emerge as an alternative to challenge illiberal progressivism has meant that they feel like they have no other choice.

Meanwhile, the large number of people with views fitting into neither progressive or reactionary camps have largely been shut out of the cultural conversation, with only a few exceptions. These include people as diverse as pro-life feminists, culturally conservative LGBTs

and their allies, old-school socialists who do not agree with the new left, the devoutly religious but socially libertarian, and the like. Many can actually be described as being minorities within minorities. They are generally viewed as undifferentiated 'moderates' from a culture war point of view, and are often viewed as part of the enemy by both sides of the culture wars. While liberalism would have given them a true voice, the dynamics of culture wars and identity politics render them invisible.

The solution to this problem is to re-establish liberalism as a viable alternative to both sides of the culture war, and therefore as a circuit breaker to end the culture wars once and for all. While liberals are divided both economically and socially on various issues, we do share a common philosophy at the core: the idea of the moral equality of humans, and the idea that more liberty is always better. We need to unite to promote these ideas in our culture.

In previous chapters, we have established that liberalism is in fact an ideology that benefits the agenda of progressives, conservatives and in-betweens alike, and can be the best answer to many of today's cultural conflicts. The challenge for liberals in today's cultural landscape is to show people this fact.

Progressives are concerned about ending bigotry and promoting social justice. We need to show them that a culture encouraging freedom of speech and frank dialogue about values and feelings is the best way to bring about these goals. We need to argue for the case that frank dialogue, while not always the most pleasing to the ear, is the only way to actually change attitudes, and that forced compliance only causes resentment. Conservatives are concerned about the erosion of the freedom to live life as their conscience

demands, by activist governments and 'social justice warriors', including in relation to their religious values. We need to show them that a liberal culture in both society and government is the best guarantee to their worst fears not happening. We need to assure them that, while many liberals may have more progressive values personally, they will not force such viewpoints down conservatives' throats, and that for liberals, freedom of religion is always a basic and non-negotiable value.

Liberalism is also the natural home for those who don't fit with either side of the culture wars, including minorities within minorities. Unlike the 'us vs them' attitude of culture war politics and identity politics in general, liberalism says that their views should be respected equally and heard equally. We should reach out to these people and show them liberals ultimately respect their beliefs and values more than either side of the culture

wars, and how liberal values can be invoked to counter any pressure to assimilate.

Therefore, real liberalism is the solution to resolve the toxic situation we are in, as described by the preceding section.

But then, for the cure to work, we need to be clear what the cure really is. Currently, the name 'liberal' is being claimed by all sorts of imposters, from right wing authoritarian conservatives to far-left supporters of identity politics. If we simply say liberalism is the cure without being clear about what liberalism actually is, every extremist will be able to say that their solution is 'liberalism' and is therefore the cure, in response. To have a revival of the real liberalism, we need to differentiate the real thing from the many imposters out there. Therefore, it is of basic importance that we clarify what liberalism really is, i.e. a movement

and an ideology based around the idea of liberty, nothing more, and nothing less.

Liberal ideas and principles have sadly been missing in much of our cultural and political discourse in recent years. We need to actively re-introduce such ideas into mainstream cultural and political discourse, where possible.

Liberals can use examples from current affairs debates to demonstrate the benefits liberal principles bring to a diverse range of political groups. The debate surrounding same-sex marriage is a good example of a golden opportunity for liberals. Looking at the history of this issue, it was mostly the more conservative gay and lesbian people who championed this issue, against the wishes of the more radical 'gay activist establishment'. Not surprisingly, liberals, in particular libertarians, were among the first to embrace

the 'freedom to marry' for gay couples, when much of the left was still sceptical of the idea of expanding and encouraging marriage in any way, and much of the right was still too anti-gay to consider the idea rationally. More recently, with the pro-equality side winning or heading towards an inevitable win, conservatives have been demanding exemptions based on conscience, and libertarians have been their friends in this. The history of the same-sex marriage issue shows that, ultimately, liberal principles have been useful for all sides when they most needed it, and liberal politics is fair to progressives, conservatives and in-betweens alike.

When activists argue that governments should do this or that, liberals have an opportunity to introduce the idea of democratic mandate, and the value of obtaining a democratic mandate before demanding any government action on collective issues. The debate surrounding action

on climate change is a good example of the value of democratic mandate. The new left continues to complain about the (in their view) inadequacy of action on these issues by democratic governments in the Western world. As a result, many of them would essentially like to see top-down action. However, recent events in Australia show why this is a bad idea. In the early 2010s the center-left Gillard government instituted one of the world's most expensive carbon taxes, without backing by a clear democratic mandate. The country's carbon emissions was effectively reduced. However, many Australians felt that they were being hit with a tax they did not approve, and subsequently voted in the centre-right Abbott government to abolish the carbon tax. As of this writing, Australia has no carbon price, and no plans to introduce one again. This example clearly shows the unsustainability of top-down action without a clear democratic mandate. Therefore, if climate activists want to see increased government action, they should put

their efforts into convincing their fellow citizens rather than to put direct pressure on politicians. Of course, this is just one example out of many others.

Liberals can, and should, take an active part in addressing racism, sexism and homophobia in our society, and should also champion our liberal values in doing so. Since liberals believe in the equality of human beings, we should be culturally opposed to discrimination on group characteristics, be it race, gender or sexuality. However, since liberals also believe in freedom of speech, we should not use illiberal means to 'shut down' those who believe otherwise. Rather, we can argue our point of view in a rational debate with our opponents. In the face of 'social justice warriors' who believe it is necessary to shut down the 'platform' of those they view as 'bigots', and who often accuse liberals of not being serious enough about social justice, we should also make our case

confidently regarding why our way is the better way. As liberals, we believe that reason will win out in the end, when we have rational debates. We believe that having taboos and restrictions on free speech detract from rational debates, and leaves issues unresolved. Finally, we also believe that forced compliance with social norms doesn't eliminate prejudice, it only creates resentment and further resistance to real change.

An important part of the work to revive liberalism is to demonstrate to different groups in society that liberalism is ultimately the best, or at least the least worst, solution for them in the long run. Liberalism would ultimately deliver the wishes of both conservatives and progressives better than their current ideologies, and I believe it is important that we reach out to them with this very rational message. It will also be important to reach out to under-represented minorities within

minorities, like pro-life feminists, legally pro-choice pro-lifers, socially libertarian socialists, culturally conservative LGBTs and so on, as the politics of identity and division simply don't work for them, and only a liberal world would allow them the moral agency they are due.

The Road to Rekindling Liberalism

With the great confusion surrounding what liberalism is nowadays, and the lack of a firm and clear meaning of what this ideology is among the general public, it is unsurprising that liberalism, even with its great cannon including many great statements and thinkers going all the way back to Mills and Locke, is not exactly the most appealing idea to today's young intellectuals. I'm sure that 'progressivism', socialism, or even 'moderatism' have more keen adherents than liberalism nowadays.

And yet, this is a sad situation, one that does not bode well for our future. Liberalism is the very embodiment of the enlightenment, and the great foundation on which society can achieve a state of peace and rational progress. The important value of freedom of religion is

also rooted in liberalism, and if liberalism is lost, this too is ultimately under threat.

Moreover, liberalism is also a cultural attitude, one where freedom of speech, respect of each other's moral consciences, and rational debate are encouraged. A revival of liberalism would also mean a revival of these values, all important attributes of an adaptive, healthy, forward-looking society.

Liberalism is a Demanding Political Faith, but it's Worth It

To conclude this book, I have one last important thing to say about liberalism. Liberalism is indeed a demanding political faith, like no other. I'll explain why.

Firstly, to be liberal is to embrace ambiguity and imperfection. Unlike many ideologies, there is no one clear, agreed upon way to implement liberalism. To implement conservatism is simply to follow traditions, at least in most cases. Likewise, the path to implementing collectivist socialism is also clear: you may start by supporting the nationalisation of industries, for example. In a similar vein, most people would have a clear understanding of what an agenda of 'progressivism' means in practice, even though that term defies precise definition. But because liberty is a complex

concept, and positive and negative liberties may conflict with each other, to implement liberalism may mean quite a wide range of possibilities, none of which may be 'perfect'. Each liberal will have to use their conscience to assess how liberalism is to be best implemented for each issue, and be prepared that other liberals may not agree with them.

Secondly, to be liberal is to forego the comforts of being in an ideological tribe, and to accept the need to work with people you sometimes vehemently disagree with. Since liberals may vehemently disagree with each other on a wide range of issues and may indeed find themselves in opposing political parties, liberals can never form an ideological tribe like conservatives or 'progressives' can. However, liberals still need to work together to promote the cultural values of liberalism in society, and to promote a liberal culture in our politics and governance.

Thirdly, to be liberal is to avoid the temptation of utopia. Liberalism is ultimately about maximising each individual's liberty, rather than building a utopian society. A true liberal should only wish that society affords individuals the liberty to follow their consciences, and should never even harbour the slightest idea to coerce society into behaving in a certain way. While liberals can culturally promote their own cultural ideals, they should refrain from supporting the use of political power to promote their preferred cultural positions. As most human beings have very strong views on some things, this is more easily said than done. There have been quite a few people who started out as liberals, who still call themselves liberals, but have in essence embraced either statist conservatism or statist progressivism, at least partially. Liberals must be vigilant against 'falling to the dark side', so to speak.

However, all this being said, I still believe it is worth embracing liberalism. Because ultimately, if you embrace a statist or authoritarian ideology, one day it will disagree with you, and it will be painful. With liberalism, you know you can always follow your conscience freely, and you know that other true liberals will not force you to 'toe the party line'.

Also from TaraElla...

Liberal Revival Now: A Moral and Practical Case for a 21st Century Back-to-Basics Liberalism

What does liberal mean? There can be no agreement, it seems. Still, if liberals, left-liberals and right-liberals alike, share something in common, it's the fundamental belief in liberty. Liberalism is unlike any other ideology, in that it does not seek to use government to social engineer a certain type of society. At the heart of liberalism, I believe, is the value that all people are morally equal, i.e. they have an equal right to be moral actors. And in the clear absence of a morally perfect person anywhere in the world, this is simply the only moral and logical position to take. Liberals can be personally conservative, progressive or radical, but they do not use the government to

engineer a conservative, progressive or radical society.

With the great confusion surrounding what liberalism is nowadays, and the lack of a firm and clear meaning of what this ideology is among the general public, it is unsurprising that liberalism, even with its great cannon including many great statements and thinkers going all the way back to Mills and Locke, is not exactly the most appealing idea to today's young intellectuals. And yet, this is a sad situation, one that does not bode well for our future.

Liberalism is the very embodiment of the enlightenment, and the great foundation on which society can achieve a state of peace and rational progress.

This book will demonstrate why liberalism remains the best political ideology, for both the culturally conservative and progressive alike. Moreover, liberalism is also a cultural attitude, one where freedom of speech, respect of each other's moral consciences, and rational debate

are encouraged. A revival of liberalism would also mean a revival of these values, all important attributes of an adaptive, healthy, forward-looking society. This book will discuss ways in which liberalism can be reinvigorated for modern and future society.

Also from TaraElla...

3 Movements (Feminism, LGBT Rights, Marriage Equality), 2 Diaries, 1 Trans Woman's Message

Natalie is a young trans woman living in the early 21st century. Her diaries chart both her own transition story, and the cultural and political events of the 2000s and 2010s in the US, UK and Australia. In the beginning, she had felt rejected by feminism all her life, and also decided to reject feminism. Feminism's complicated relationship with marriage equality, something she was passionate about, became yet another reason for her to reject feminism. However, as feminism changed, so did her perspective. Did Natalie ultimately decide to become a feminist? And if so, on what terms?

From the author: "I could have written a manifesto of inclusive feminism, but I know that some of you would still be unconvinced. So instead here is a story, inspired by real life stories I have known. I am sure many of you will be convinced of the need for a more inclusive feminism after reading this.

While Natalie's story is fictional, the perspective taken on both being trans and the social and political movements of the 2000s and 2010s are inspired by real life accounts, and represent the very real perceptions of real people living today. Stories like Natalie's are out there everywhere, and if feminism is to be truly inclusive and effective, the messages contained in this book should be seriously considered."